

### **Third Scene--The Iceberg.**

#### **Chapter 12.**

Alone! alone on the Frozen Deep!

The Arctic sun is rising dimly in the dreary sky. The beams of the cold northern moon, mingling strangely with the dawning light, clothe the snowy plains in hues of livid gray. An ice-field on the far horizon is moving slowly southward in the spectral light. Nearer, a stream of open water rolls its slow black waves past the edges of the ice. Nearer still, following the drift, an iceberg rears its crags and pinnacles to the sky; here, glittering in the moonbeams; there, looming dim and ghost-like in the ashy light.

Midway on the long sweep of the lower slope of the iceberg, what objects rise, and break the desolate monotony of the scene? In this awful solitude, can signs appear which tell of human life? Yes! The black outline of a boat just shows itself, hauled up on the berg. In an ice-cavern behind the boat the last red embers of a dying fire flicker from time to time over the figures of two men. One is seated, resting his back against the side of the cavern. The other lies prostrate, with his head on his comrade's knee. The first of these men is awake, and thinking. The second reclines, with his still white face turned up to the sky--sleeping or dead. Days and days since, these two have fallen behind on the march of the expedition of relief. Days and days since, these two have been given up by their weary and failing companions as doomed and lost. He who sits thinking is Richard Wardour. He who lies sleeping or dead is Frank Aldersley.

The iceberg drifts slowly, over the black water, through the ashy light. Minute by minute the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute the deathly cold creeps nearer and nearer to the lost men.

Richard Wardour rouses himself from his thoughts--looks at the still white face beneath him--and places his hand on Frank's heart. It still beats feebly. Give him his share of the food and fuel still stored in the boat, and Frank may live through it. Leave him neglected where he lies, and his death is a question of hours--perhaps minutes; who knows?

Richard Wardour lifts the sleeper's head and rests it against the cavern side. He goes to the boat, and returns with a billet of wood. He stoops to place the wood on the fire--and stops. Frank is dreaming, and murmuring in his dream. A woman's name passes his lips. Frank is in England again--at the ball--whispering to Clara the confession of his love.

Over Richard Wardour's face there passes the shadow of a deadly thought. He rises from the fire; he takes the wood back to the boat. His iron strength is shaken, but it still holds out. They are drifting nearer and nearer to the open sea. He can launch the boat without help; he can take the food and the fuel with him. The sleeper on the iceberg is the man who has robbed him of Clara--who has wrecked the hope and the happiness of his life. Leave the man in his sleep, and let him die!

So the tempter whispers. Richard Wardour tries his strength on the boat. It moves: he has got it under control. He stops, and looks round. Beyond him is the open sea. Beneath him is the man who has robbed him of Clara. The shadow of the deadly thought grows and darkens over his face. He waits with his hands on the boat--waits and thinks.

The iceberg drifts slowly--over the black water; through the ashy light. Minute by minute, the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute, the deathly cold creeps nearer to the sleeping man. And still Richard Wardour waits--waits and thinks.

Fourth Scene--The Garden.